



Section 5: Program Partners

Getting Involved:

Protection and Advocacy Programs for Individuals With Mental Illness (PAIMI) and National Children's Mental Health Awareness Day

What is National Children's Mental Health Awareness Day?

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's (SAMHSA) Center for Mental Health Services is launching an annual national initiative called "National Children's Mental Health Awareness Day." National Children's Mental Health Awareness Day is designated as a day in May of each year to coincide with "May Is Mental Health Month." This day presents an opportunity for SAMHSA and children's mental health initiatives to promote resilience, recovery, and the transformation of mental health services delivery for children and youth with serious mental health needs and their families.

The theme of the inaugural celebration of National Children's Mental Health Awareness Day is "Thriving in the Community." Children's mental health initiatives will hold similar events and other activities throughout the country to build awareness that children's mental health needs are real and that progress is being made toward developing effective strategies for achieving the vision of a life in the community for everyone.

Why is PAIMI participating in National Children's Mental Health Awareness Day?

National Children's Mental Health Awareness Day offers PAIMI programs an opportunity to educate the mental health community and others regarding the overall Protection and Advocacy (P&A) System—the mandated nationwide network of disability rights agencies that provide advocacy services and legal representation for people with disabilities, protecting them from abuse, neglect, and civil rights violations.

P&As are significantly involved in working toward public policy that is designed to keep families secure, stable, and together, and providing services for children with disabilities (including those with serious mental health needs). P&As are involved in numerous activities related to children. For example, advocates work to ensure that mothers have access to good prenatal care; that children born with disabilities have access to the health care and long-term supports that help them become more independent; that children with disabilities are welcome in day-care and pre-school settings, and have access to critical early intervention services, as well as a free, appropriate, public education. In addition, P&As advocate to ensure that transition-age youth receive assistance, guidance, and supports as they move from public school to the world of post-secondary education or work in their communities.

Examples of the breadth of child-related activities in which P&As take part follows:

- Monitor conditions in residential treatment centers serving youth and advocate for movement of youth into appropriate home and community settings;



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- Advocate to preserve and enforce access to rehabilitative and mental health services under the Medicaid Early Periodic Screening Diagnosis and Treatment (EPSDT) program;
- Advocate for the right to be free from unnecessary restraints—such as seclusion, mechanical restraints, and administrative segregation—on the liberty of youth with mental illness confined in detention/correctional facilities; and
- Advocate for positive behavioral supports and proper disciplinary proceedings pursuant to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act.

National Children's Mental Health Awareness Day also offers P&As an opportunity to publicize their legal advocacy services and supports for children with disabilities available in their communities and their local success stories in systemic changes they have influenced.

National Children's Mental Health Awareness Day gives P&As the opportunity to demonstrate to the public that children's mental health needs are real and treatable by leveraging May Is Mental Health Month, national SAMHSA activities, and the activities of other SAMHSA partners.

How can P&As and PAIMI programs get involved?

P&As and PAIMI programs can become involved in National Children's Mental Health Awareness Day in several ways. For instance, a program could hold a community outreach event that brings together children, youth, and families in need of services that would not otherwise be engaged. Another event may include partnering with other local children's mental health initiatives to engage the media and to educate local policymakers on effective practices for meeting the mental health needs of children, youth, and families.

In addition, P&As and the PAIMI program, in particular, are specifically encouraged to contact local system of care communities and participate in any local events that they may be sponsoring.

Where can I get more information about National Children's Mental Health Awareness Day?

Information and materials on National Children's Mental Health Awareness Day are available online at www.systemsofcare.samhsa.gov. You can also call the **National Disability Rights Network** at 202-408-9514, Fax: 202-408-9520, TTY: 202-408-9521 for more information.

The National Disability Rights Network (NDRN) is the nonprofit membership organization for the federally mandated Protection and Advocacy (P&A) Systems—including the Protection and Advocacy Program for Individuals with Mental Illness. The NDRN serves a wide range of individuals with disabilities—including those with mental illnesses as well as with other disabilities—including, but not limited to, cognitive, sensory, and physical. They assist State P&A programs by guarding against abuse; advocating for basic rights; and ensuring accountability in health care, education, employment, housing, transportation, and within juvenile and criminal justice systems. Further information regarding the P&As and the NDRN is available at www.ndrn.org. NDRN may be contacted directly by phone at 202-408-9514, fax 202-408-9520, or TTY 202-408-9521.